

[He and the Old Woman]

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LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: HE AND THE OLD WOMAN ([see also [Windmill Orchard?)])

Date of First Writing January 12, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Emanuel Schumpert (white)

Fictitious Name Ed Leightsey

Address West Columbia, S. C.

County Lexington

Occupation Marmer Farmer and Market Gardener.

Name of Writer John L. Dove

Name of Reviser State Office

“As fresh as the water in the Congaree,” shouted Ed Leightsey, as he patted the tender green leaves of a huge collard lying on a counter under a big signboard marked WINDMILL ORCHARD - Peaches and Grapes - on the long curb market. “Top of the

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morning to you, sir! Yes, sir, it's collards today from over the river, and they are good," he greeted the writer that chilly morning in December, 1938.

When the old gentleman was told that his collards needed no further advertising, a smile lighted his wrinkled sun-tanned face; not just a C10 - 1/31/41 - S. C.

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business-getting smile, but one that expressed the warmth of human kindness. People stopping at his market stall, or even looking his way, were greeted with that smile and his best wishes.

"But why do you say that?" he inquired.

"Because the market inspector placed his approval on your collards when he said just a little while ago, 'If you want a story of a good man and a good farmer, see old Ed Leightsey down on the 1100 block of Assembly Street.' And it's yours, not the collard's story that is wanted, Mr. Leightsey. See?"

"Fresh collards, fresh Congaree — Oh, yes, yes, the market inspector. He's always pulling things on me." Grinning good-naturedly, he inquired, "A story did you say?" Oh, well, I'll be glad to tell what little there is to tell, but I don't think it will excite you much."?

He turned to Mrs. Leightsey, his wife, a small gray-haired woman of around sixty years, and inquired: "Minnie, where'd be the best place to start telling of our troubles?"

"Just anywhere you wish, Ed, but don't forget our school days and our trip to Charleston."

While Mr. Leightsey was left to tell the story of his and Minnie's troubles, Mrs. Leightsey attended to the wants of the many shoppers who stopped to price the neatly arranged piles of onions, cabbage, collards, turnips, potatoes, pecans, peanuts, eggs, fruits, and flowers. All of this, except the apples and citrous fruits, had been produced at Windmill

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Orchard - the Leightsey farm - six miles west of Congaree River and the town of West Columbia.

Nodding in the direction of the Congaree, he [bagan?]: "I was born just over the river, a few miles in Lexington County, on January 3, 1871. So you see I'm past my sixty-seventh birthday. I went through what they would call, I 3 reckon, the seventh or eighth grade at school. Anyway, I studied the old blue-back speller, the dictionary, Reed and Kellogg's grammar, history, arithmetic, through stocks and bonds, and the big geography that had the pictures of wild animals and big snakes living among the trees in the jungles. I quit school at twenty years of age to take a job with the Danville Lumber Company at Dixiana, South Carolina, at seventy-five cents a day and my board.

"Well, sir, Dixiana is one of the few places in the world where one can be out of sight of land and water all at the same time. It's not far from where I was born, and I know every pig path and cow track in it. Like the greenhorn I was, I took a notion that I could grow farm crops on that land. So, after two years at the sawmill, I quit my job and used the money I'd saved to buy a mule and a few farm tools. I pitched my tent, early in 1894, on some cut-over land in that God-forsaken sandhill community and started to farming. The land around Dixiana was, and still is, so poor that the only use we Lexingtonians can find for it is a sort of space filler, or just so much poor sand put there to hold the world together. That's why I just said that Dixiana is one of the few places where one can be out of sight of land and water all at the same time.

"Well, of course, I had no trouble in renting enough land at Dixiana for a one-horse farm. And I got down to work like a smart fellow in the spring of 1894. Soon I had the land prepared and my crops planted. The seasons were very good that year, and my cotton and corn, my punkins and taters, and my other crops bloomed on that fresh sand. But, as luck would have it, the bumblebees and caterpillars found those [?] blossoms and admired them so much that they charged upon them, wearing themselves and the blossoms out against the ground.

"You know we old-timers used to look upon the poor little cotton stalks that produced no more than one or two blossoms as bumblebee cotton. The bumblebee is a pretty heavy bee, and I've seen the puny cotton stalks stalk bend to the ground under its weight when it lit in a blossom to such honey.

"Well, I made a failure, and a big'un, at trying to farm on that poor land at Dixiana. My daddy, Jacob Leightsey, heard about it and came to see me. He persuaded me to return with him to the old home near West Columbia. So I swallowed my pride, mounted my little mule, called my dog, and returned, like the prodigal son, to the land of my father.

"At the beginning of 1895, I went to work as a one-horse sharecropper for my daddy. I slept in the back room of a little commissary store and cooked and ate my scant rations of meat and bread and buttermilk in the same room for two years. I worked hard, too, during those years at growing corn, melons, taters, tomatoes, beans, turnips, and a little cotton. Luck was with me, and I was able to produce a lot of stuff to sell in Columbia. After giving my daddy one-fourth of the receipts for rent, I had \$800 saved at the beginning of 1897."

At this point in his narrative, Ed Leightsey paused for a moment to refresh his memory on an important event in his younger days. Then he continued, "When 1897 came, I did a very wise thing - I bought, mainly on credit, twenty acres of my daddy's land and built thereon a four-room cottage .

He paused again just long enough to walk around to the opposite side of the counter from where Mrs. Leightsey was standing. Squinting in the direction of the "old woman", as he oftentimes refers to Minnie, he sighed and remarked: "I then did a very foolish thing - I bought a buggy." Mrs. Leightsey, hearing the remark, looked around just in time to see his big left fist upraised and 4 "You know we old-timers used to look upon call the poor little cotton stalks that produced no more than one or two blossoms as bumblebee cotton. The

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Ed Leightsey backed away just in time to prevent a board off a packing case, held in the uplifted hand of his beligerent appearing Minnie, from falling on his head. At a safe distance, he stood and stared at Minnie for a moment, while he rolled a cigar between his thick lips like a bulldog gnawing on a meaty bone.

The demonstration of good-humored badinage over, Mrs. Leightsey joined Ed, or “He” as she referred to him, in telling the story. And both tongues chimed competitively in detailing the incidents - the ups and downs, gains and losses - of the decade between 1898 and 1908, when they were struggling to make secure the happiness they now enjoy. It was revealed, however, that Minnie cooked and washed and nursed Ed and the children while he pulled the bell-cord over his mule; that they worked and saved; and that, through crop rotations with the use of lime, legumes, and home-made fertilizers, they developed their land to a high state of cultivation.

A number of shoppers having called at Windmill Orchard stand to inspect some flowers, Mrs. Leightsey left Ed to continue the story: “Yes, Minnie was a real battle-axe in the struggle during those years, and she never complained. Without her help, I couldn't have made the grade. Just as fast as we could produce flowers, fruits, vegetables, eggs, chickens, and other things sufficient to pay the cost, ten dollars per acre, of one twenty-acre tract of my daddy's farm, we obligated ourselves to buy an adjoining twenty acres of the 6 old farm. I found, all the while, a ready market for our produce among the people living in the city across the Congaree, six miles away.

“Yes, Minnie and I worked hard during those years, and luck, on the whole, was with us. Our acres increased rapidly in length and fertility, as did our family, until we had eleven children. After ten years of hard work and penny-pinching, we managed to save \$1,350 - the amount we paid my daddy for the 135 acres we now own. And during the entire time, I didn't buy a single bale of hay or bushel of corn with which to feed man or beast.

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"After we had finished paying for the farm, in 1908, Minnie and I agreed that the time had come for us to take our long delayed honeymoon vacation, the trip to Charleston she mentioned a while ago."

He took in a deep breath ——— "But, maybe I'd better let her tell about that, for I believe she got more out of the trip than I did."

Mrs. Leightsey had just closed a sale, deposited the receipts in the till, and was again listening intently to Ed's narrative. Catching the cue, she began: "You see, it's like this, he has never wanted much said about that Charleston trip. Well, I finally persuaded him that he needed to get away from the farm for a few days. So, during the winter of 1908, he agreed that we should go to Charleston, and to Charleston we went. Everything went lovely until we reached the city by the sea; then trouble, as well as fun, began for me. Neither of us had ever seen the ocean, and, of course, we were not familiar with boats and boating. When we looked out upon those rolling waves of water, I decided it would be nice for us to take a boat ride around the bay. I wanted to get a close view of Fort Sumter and other places in and around the harbor we had read so much about. But, when he learned of my desire, he bucked like a stubborn old mule, and said, 'Why, Minnie, the very idea! I have always felt there was just as much water in Congaree River as I would care to 7 undertake to pull you out of in case of an accident to you in crossing. I just can't and won't risk your sweet life out there in that pond.' So we didn't go. Anyway, we enjoyed our trip to Charleston, and I believe it helped to get us out of the old rut."

"Yes, I'm sure the little vacation did us good," agreed Mr. Leightsey. "The old farm and home were now ours, paid for by the sweat of our brows. We felt that we needed a number of conveniences and a few luxuries. So, during the next few years, we made improvements on the home; built new barns for the livestock and poultry in accordance with plans furnished by the Clemson College Extension Division; and then we replaced the scrub and mixed breeds of cows, hogs, and chickens with purebreds. We also planted a new peach orchard, a grape vineyard, and a flower garden. Later, the pastures were

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newly fenced and sodded to adapted clovers and grasses and, of course, we bought an automobile.” He then looked up at the big signboard above his head and added, “We then built a windmill with which to pump water into the home, and to the barns. Thus it was our place became known as Windmill Orchard. “When the time comes for me to be at home to look after the planting, cultivating, harvesting, and packing of the crops, Minnie comes to Columbia and looks after the selling on the market. I have learned through long experience on this market to make my plantings throughout the year, as the season permit, and I generally have the right amount of produce to sell at the right time on this market. This curb system of selling home-raised produce fits into my scheme perfectly. It is a great improvement over the old street peddling system I once had to practice in Columbia.

“I sort (grade) every pound of my produce; then I put it up in even weight boxes or bags or baskets before offering it for sale. No, sir, there are no 8 little taters at the bottom of the pack and big taters at the top of the pack. I fix them all as near alike in size, color, and quality as is possible for me to fix them. Too, I've been in this business long enough to know I've got to give the trade what the trade wants; not what I want the trade to take. When I once sell a person, he stays sold. He comes back again for more. Yes, sir, that's what it takes to make 'em keep on comin' to our stand. And we sell from this curb stand around \$300.00 worth of our produce each month. We also make sales elsewhere.

“I'll be very glad to have you drive out to Windmill Orchard, the farm. Minnie and I sleep there at night, and I'm there part of the time during the day. Come when it suits you, but I can come nearer being found at home during the planting season in the spring. The place is located on a country road, six miles west of the Congaree River bridge that separates the city of Columbia from the town of West Columbia.”

Windmill Orchard is, in truth, a well kept farm. Some of the land is on the streams, where there is the choicest of grazing for cattle, sheep, and hogs; other portions of the farm contain forests of tall, straight, long leaf pine; and others again are the well-cultivated fields, orchards, and vineyards. In close proximity to the modern livestock and poultry

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barns is an old well-preserved two-story residence. There, too, a windmill slowly turns at its task of raising and lowering the long pump shaft over the well. It keeps a fresh supply of water for the birds and the beasts around the barnyard; for use in the home; and, figuratively speaking, it keeps the name - Windmill Orchard - on the board in the market place.

Ed Leightsey, progressive in his farm management methods and of a practical turn of mind, has no particular interest in legislation or politics. "Farm legislation can have but little meaning to me and the old woman, for we've always 9 lived and boarded at the same place," he boasted.

By that, he means they produce their fruits and vegetables, bacon and grits, milk and honey, and, in short, their entire living at Windmill Orchard. "And I've crossed and recrossed Congaree River with loads of produce to help feed the people of Columbia for forty-one years. And you bet I've fed 'em good."

The market inspector and many others, who have long known the old Dutchman, refer to him as "Old Ed Leightsey." The market inspector said: "Long before the newsboys begin their chant, 'Morning State,' on the streets of the city, you can see old Ed Leightsey drive up Gervais Street with his flivver loaded to its gunwales with potatoes, turnips, peaches, grapes, melons, chickens, eggs, and other things in season - all ready for sale when the market opens at an early morning hour. He never lets the grass grow under his feet. He never walks to his work; he runs."

While old Ed Leightsey says that you can bet on his having helped to feed the people of Columbia, you can bet your bottom dollar, with safety, that he has fed those eleven children of his at the fountainhead. Judging from the hale and hearty appearance of them, they must have been "buttermilk fed chickens."

Yes, old Ed Leightsey claims that he and Minnie have reared eleven children - six sons and five daughters - at Windmill Orchard, and that each has been given a high school

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education. "And they are all married and gone now." he said with a sigh. "Ira is a building contractor; Vernon, a lumber dealer; John runs a garage; Arney is a textile worker; and Charles is a farmer. The girls are now Mesdames Stuckey, Williamson, Jeffcoat, Senn, and Sharp. And according to the last count, we have thirty-one grandchildren."

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Even though the songs and cries of the Leightsey children are heard no longer around the old home, Ed and Minnie play, as well as work. "It is fun for us to come to the market every day and watch the cars and the people go by," is the way she put it. And they continue to cross and re-cross Congaree River each day, except Sunday, on their way to and from their produce stand on the big curb market under the new steel shed. Under the sign - Windmill Orchard - they carry on, side by side, as was their wont in their childhood days at the old backwoods school.